

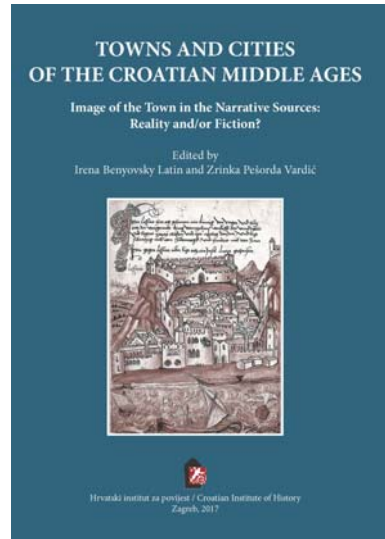
Irena Benyovsky Latin and Zrinka Pešorda Vardić, ed., *Towns and Cities of the Croatian Middle Ages: Image of the Town in the Narrative Sources: Reality and/or Fiction?* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2017)

Summary

About the volume

Towns and Cities of the Croatian Middle Ages continues the series on medieval urban history, which started with the international triennial at the Croatian History Institute in 2010 and the papers published in 2014, in the proceedings titled *Towns and Cities of the Croatian Middle Ages: Authority and Property*. The present volume focuses on the *Image of the Town in the Narrative Sources: Reality and/or Fiction?* and results from the second international triennial, held in Zagreb in Autumn 2013. Our aim was to encourage a scholarly debate on the narrative sources from the medieval and early modern periods as sources for exploring the image of medieval towns and cities (primarily Croatian). However, we also wanted to address the following questions: What was the image of the city in specific types of narrative sources, regarding their nature, date of composition, and provenance? How was the urban memory of a city construed through them? Is it possible to reconstruct medieval urbanity based on narrative sources? What is the level of research on individual medieval towns and cities based on this type of sources? And eventually, to what extent does the image of the town in narrative sources correspond to the reality?

Sources for research on the image of the medieval town (its appearance, social structures, urban institutions and phenomena) are very varied. These may be written sources of different provenances, visual or material, contemporary or coming from a later historical period. In international scholarship, narrative sources have been increasingly perceived as offering important insights on medieval urbanity. In this context, narrative sources have been used in various ways in Croatian historiography: some have been analysed in great



detail, others only partially and selectively. Their authenticity and credibility have often been questioned, and there are still many controversies in research approaches. When other types of sources are missing, narrative sources may appear very attractive, since they offer at least some sort of a picture, which may perhaps be used with the help of “critical methodology” to discover grains of historical truth. However, narrative sources are also historical facts in their own right – as the historiographic image of the city within them is created in correlation with the context of their time and the motives behind their composition. In the territory of present-day Croatia, a considerable number of narrative sources outlining the image of the town to a greater or lesser extent were produced during the medieval and early modern times, and they belong to a range of different genres. The level and area of their preservation likewise vary, from fragments to complete works. Some Dalmatian centres preserve an exceptionally rich opus, while Slavonian towns and cities can offer an incomparably smaller number of known and/or preserved narrative sources. Of course, one should by no means neglect a number of “foreign” narrative sources that mention this region, which have only been partly known and used in the research on the Croatian Middle Ages.

The image of the town in narrative sources depends on the time and place of their composition, as well as their nature and provenance. For this reason, it is extremely important to take into account the local setting, time period, and circumstances of writing. Besides determining the tradition, heritage, or influence of another source upon the narrative, it is crucial to understand its reception in the given time and space, as well as to know the structure and availability of previous writings that the authors could rely upon. Narrative sources were mostly written by the clergy, from the High Middle Ages increasingly by secular persons: local ones or foreigners who lived (temporarily or permanently) in the given settings or elsewhere. Moreover, narrative sources are not merely individual products; they also reflect the collective production of an urban community. In some of them, hands of several compilers may be discerned, and some works have been preserved in various redactions adapted to individual local settings. All these issues bring us back to the open question from the title of this volume: Are the narrative sources from the medieval and early modern periods fiction or do they contain some specific realia that we are looking for in absence of other sources (and does it make sense to look for them at all)? And even if they do contain grains of historical truth, do we possess instruments to discover them, to distil them from various narrative discourses that our sources consist of? Eventually, what kind of image of the medieval town do these narrative sources offer? Articles in this volume offer some answers to these numerous research questions by focusing on various topics related to the (Croatian) medieval urban history.